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COMMERCE FOR NOAA

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SUBJECT: FUNDING THE OKEANOS EXPLORER

FROM AMBASSADOR CAMERON HUME

¶11. (U) Summary. We have an extraordinary opportunity to advance our environmental, scientific and diplomatic agendas in Indonesia and beyond but we need \$1 million in State funding to make it happen. The Indonesian government has invited NOAA to send the Okeanos Explorer, the world's most advanced research and exploration vessel, to Indonesia for the May 2009 World Oceans Conference hosted by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. The voyage would end a forty-year refusal by the Indonesians to allow U.S. research vessels to explore their waters. End summary.

Advancing Science and Environmental Policy

¶12. (U) When it is fully outfitted next year, NOAA's new Okeanos Explorer will be the most advanced marine exploration and research vessel in the world. Remote-controlled vehicles will be able to plunge to the depth of six kilometers. The ship's "telepresence" technology allows scientists in remote command centers around the world to share in and guide the exploration in real time. This will shatter the current marine research paradigm which requires scientists to be on board. The ship will collect critical scientific information to evaluate the impact of oceans on climate change and to look specifically at the role of the Coral Triangle in preserving the world's marine biodiversity.

¶13. (U) The opportunity to send the ship to Indonesian waters is a historic first in marine science but has a short shelf life. Indonesia has never allowed a government scientific research vessel to conduct joint research in its waters. We have received assurances from the Indonesian military that they will approve the necessary voyage permits, largely because the conference is a priority of President Yudhoyono's. If we cannot time the voyage for the World Oceans Conference, the offer may expire. The Indonesian scientific ministries are anxious to partner and have already set aside ship time for their own research vessel, the Baruna Jaya, to accompany the Okeanos on a joint research program. The Indonesians see this collaboration as the first step in what they hope will become multi-year scientific collaboration with the U.S. and will help serve as a model of open global collaboration to advance the world's scientific agenda.

Benefits of a Voyage

¶14. (U) An Okeanos voyage to Indonesia would provide multiple benefits. It would:

--Signal the strong support of the United States government saving one of the most geologically active and biologically diverse regions of the world;
--Advance scientific exploration of this area;

--Showcase NOAA technology to the rest of the world;
--Establish a new paradigm in marine research through the Okeanos' telepresence capabilities;
--Provide a wealth of information on the role of oceans in climate change to understand the marine ecosystem and climate change impacts; and
--Encourage Indonesia to be more open to international scientific collaboration.

¶ 15. (U) There is also an important public diplomacy element. The Okeanos Explorer's advanced image-capture, sampling, and communications systems will enable researchers and the public to view flora, fauna, and physical undersea features that would be otherwise inaccessible. These images could be beamed to the World Oceans Conference and CTI Summit to provide real-time exploration imagery of areas never before seen by man. News Corporation has virtually assured us that they would air coverage of the voyage on Fox News and we are working with the National Geographic Channel on a possible documentary. We believe this story will be picked up around the world. Here in Indonesia, we would be seen as working cooperatively with Indonesians on a topic of great importance to them.

Making it Happen

¶ 16. (U) Getting the world's best exploration and research vessel to make its maiden voyage to the World Oceans Conference while conducting vital research in the most diverse marine area is too good an opportunity to pass up. But we need funding. NOAA will soon make an internal decision on whether to send the Okeanos, but

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will stop planning efforts unless some funding has been located. NOAA has no international budget for this unexpected opportunity, which would cost \$4.7 million. We believe that the benefits of the mission far outweigh the costs and believe that funding can be provided by State Department, NOAA and private donations. USAID has notionally committed \$500,000 in parallel financing for affiliated marine research collaboration with the Government of Indonesia. In order to meet NOAA's ship planning deadlines, we need a signal of \$1 million in State funding by mid-December.

HUME